



## **Planning Commission MEETING AGENDA**

Thursday, May 29, 2025 - 1:00 PM  
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office  
14 S Harrison Street

**1. Call to Order**

**2. Draft Chapter Review**

- a. Draft review of the following chapters: Community Facilities & Services, and Housing.

**3. Discussion**

- a. This meeting will be conducted as a workshop. As such, it will be informal in nature and there is no scheduled opportunity for public comment. Written public feedback may be forwarded to the Planning and Zoning Department at [planningandzoning@eastonmd.gov](mailto:planningandzoning@eastonmd.gov).

**4. Adjournment**

Topics for May 29, 2025  
Planning Commission Comprehensive Plan Workshop

The intended focus of the first of what will likely be multiple meetings to have the Planning Commission review the final group of Comprehensive Plan Chapters in their initial Draft format, will be the Community Facilities & Services and Housing Elements. The following is a list of potential questions/issues/talking points on which to center discussion at this Workshop:

**Community Facilities & Services**

1. Are the appropriate Community Facilities & Services addressed? Are there any that are missing and should be added?
2. Do you have any suggested revision to the Goals & Objectives for this chapter?

**Housing**

3. Is the inclusion and treatment of the Attainable Housing Task Force's Executive Summary appropriate? Should it be more concise? Does any portion require more elaboration?
4. Are the potential new Programs/Policies appropriate? Should any be expanded upon?
5. Should the specific issue of Inclusionary Zoning be discussed in greater detail?
6. Are there any housing issues not covered or addressed that should be?
7. Are there any revisions/additions to the Goals & Objectives?

## HOUSING

### INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most basic need of any community is housing. The provision of safe, decent, sanitary housing for all Town residents is a paramount concern. When a community begins to lose sight of this fact, a slow process of decay can result in dilapidated and inadequate living units, and eventually lead to vacant businesses as well. Furthermore, a cumulative feeling of despair can be brought on by the poor physical appearance of the community and its housing stock.

Housing in Easton encompasses a broad spectrum of types. It includes the stately homes built in the nineteenth century near the Downtown, public housing such as the Graham's Place project, and modern subdivisions such as Cooke's Hope, and Mulberry Station.

The quality of housing in Easton has long been a concern as has been the case in most communities. What is a relatively new concern in Easton is the cost of housing. Many people are concerned that new subdivision activity exclusively targets housing for high-income individuals.

Housing was first added as an Element of the Comprehensive Plan in the 2004 version of this document. This Plan will update that effort, but leave much of the Element unchanged. Unfortunately many of the issues associated with this Element remain essentially the same today in 2010 as they were in 2004.

They are only further complicated by the economic climate of 2010 in which foreclosures are rising, little new housing is being built, and there is a general sense that it will still be a while before things begin to improve.

Housing issues are clearly not unique to Easton. This is perhaps exemplified by the fact that the State Legislature has amended the Land Use Article to move Housing from an optional element of Comprehensive Plans to a mandatory one. Furthermore, the law now provides specifics as to what this

element needs to address. Specifically, local Comprehensive Plan Housing Elements must now address housing within the following parameters:

(a)

(1) *In this section the following words have the meanings indicated.*

(2) *"Affirmatively further fair housing" has the meaning stated in § 2-401 of the Housing and Community Development Article.*

(3) *"Area median income" has the meaning stated in § 4-1801 of the Housing and Community Development Article*

(4) *"Low-income housing" means housing that is affordable for a household with an aggregate annual income that is below 60% of the area median income.*

(5) *"Workforce housing" has the meaning stated in § 4-1801 of the Housing and Community Development Article.*

(b) *A housing element may include goals, objectives, policies, plans, and standards.*

(c) *A housing element shall address the need for affordable housing within the local jurisdiction, including:*

(1) *workforce housing; and*

(2) *low-income housing.*

(d)

(1) *Local jurisdictions have a duty to affirmatively further fair housing through their housing and urban development programs.*

(2) *The housing element of a comprehensive plan that is enacted or amended on or after January 1, 2023, shall include an assessment of fair housing to ensure that the local jurisdiction is affirmatively furthering fair housing.*

(3) *On request of a local jurisdiction, the Department of Planning, in consultation with the Department of Housing and Community Development, shall provide technical assistance for the purpose of developing the housing element of the*

*comprehensive plan.*

*(4) This subsection does not require a local jurisdiction to take, or prohibit a local jurisdiction from taking, a specific action to affirmatively further fair housing.*

*(Md. Code, LU § 3-114)*

## **HOUSING ISSUES**

There are a myriad of housing issues in Easton, but they can all be generally categorized as one of three problems: housing cost, housing quality, and housing availability. To some extent these problems are inter-related.

Housing issues, particularly housing affordability, are of such significance on Easton that theTown formed an ad hoc Attainable Housing Task Force to examine the issue and make recommendations for addressing the issues. The Task Force produced a Report, generally simultaneously with the drafting of this Plan Update. The Full Final Report can be accessed on the Town's website at: [eastonmd.gov/xxxxxxxxxx](http://eastonmd.gov/xxxxxxxxxx). The Report's Executive Summary states the following:

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*The Housing Task Force Final Report provides an analysis of Easton's housing landscape, demographic shifts, economic trends, and affordability challenges. The report also expands on the demographic, market, and workforce overview briefly provided to the Task Force at their May 23, 2024 meeting. Any data-driven insights provided herein are intended to inform housing policies and initiatives recommended by the Attainable Housing Task Force. aimed at ensuring equitable and sustainable housing opportunities.*

### **Key Findings**

#### **1. Population Growth & Demographics**

- *Easton experienced rapid population growth between 1980 and 2010, but growth rates have slowed significantly since 2010.*
- *The town's population is aging, with a 42% increase in residents aged 55+ since 2000, while the percentage of younger adults (25-44) has declined by 40%.*
- *The Hispanic population has grown significantly, increasing from 3.5%*

*of the total population in 2000 to 14% in 2020, while the Black population's share has declined.*

## *2. Housing Market Trends*

- o Since 2000, single-family detached homes have dominated new housing developments, limiting the availability of more affordable housing types such as townhomes and multi-family units.*
- o Home prices have risen sharply, with Easton's median home value increasing by 131% since 2000.*
- o Rental costs have also increased, with median rents in 2025 exceeding the affordability threshold for households earning less than 100% of Easton's Area Median Income (AMI).*

## *3. Affordability Challenges*

- o Homeownership is increasingly out of reach for middle-income families, with the home price-to-income ratio rising from 3.03 in 2000 to 4.4 in 2024, indicating a decline in affordability.*
- o Over 50% of renters in Easton are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing.*
- o Racial disparities persist, with Hispanic and Black households facing the greatest housing cost burdens and lowest homeownership rates.*

## *4. Economic & Employment Factors*

- o Job growth in Talbot County has remained stagnant since 2000, increasing at an annual rate of just 0.18%.*
- o The local economy has shifted toward lower-paying service jobs, making it harder for workers to afford housing in Easton.*
- o A significant portion (42%) of the workforce commutes from neighboring counties, highlighting the disconnect between housing costs and local wages.*

*Easton faces significant housing challenges, particularly in affordability, supply diversity, and demographic shifts. Without strategic interventions, rising housing costs and demographic imbalances could threaten the town's long-term economic sustainability and community inclusivity. This report serves as a foundation for*

*developing policies that ensure a balanced, affordable, and thriving housing market for all residents.*

The quality of housing in Easton has long been a concern of Town officials.

Easton has had a Building Official for decades. The Town Building Code regulates the quality of construction of housing. The Town utilizes the International Building Code to specify standards of construction. Today the Building Department operates with the Town Building Official who primarily conducts plan reviews, two field inspectors, a rental-housing/property maintenance inspector, and a secretary. **(UPDATE)**

The Rental Housing Inspection Program was created in 1995 to insure that rental housing units, particularly those that were older, continued to meet minimum livability standards. Landlords are required to obtain a Rental Housing license in order to rent a unit and these units are subject to subsequent inspections. This Program was extensively reviewed and revised in 2008.

### **EXISTING HOUSING PROGRAMS**

The provision of housing in the Town of Easton is overwhelmingly handled by the private sector. There are, however, a few public sector and non-profit programs that supply a limited amount of affordable housing. These include programs and projects of the Housing Commission of Talbot County, publicly subsidized but privately constructed housing (for example Chatham Village Apartments), and houses built through Habitat for Humanity of Choptank, Inc.

The Housing Commission of Talbot County (Formerly the Easton Housing Authority) maintains and manages all public housing in the Town of Easton. This includes 64 units at Doverbrook, 26 age-restricted units at Asbury Place, 15 age-restricted units at Westport, and the Graham's Park development, which provides home-ownership opportunities for 12 low-income families/individuals.

Habitat for Humanity of Choptank, Inc has been responsible for the

construction of 25 **(UPDATE)** units in Easton. These units were constructed using the Habitat methodology whereby Habitat volunteers build houses from the ground up in the community. Significant hours are required to be put in by the family who will live in the new house and, thereafter they help other new Habitat families get started on their homes. Because the land is often donated or sold to Habitat at a preferred rate and there is no labor cost, the overall cost of the houses is significantly reduced.

The Easton Town Council has succeeded in adding affordable housing units to the Town in a variety of ways, including requiring the provision of on or off-site affordable units and/or contributions to Affordable Housing as conditions of approval of discretionary projects such as Annexations or PUDs.

One of the more concerted and direct approaches to address housing issues was the creation of the Easton Affordable Housing Board. This Town-appointed Board has been charged with developing criteria and policies concerning Affordable Housing in general, and the administration of Affordable Housing Units acquired by the Town Council as conditions of approval for several development projects (such as those cited above). Much of their effort was initially devoted to developing the criteria and the selection process for purchasing these affordable units.

### LOCAL HOUSING COSTS AND ISSUES

Figure 33: Talbot County ZHVI, 2000 - 2024



#### A. Prices: Talbot County

Regarding housing costs, the Zillow Home Value Index (ZHVI) can be used to understand the general direction of home values in a community over time<sup>1</sup>. Nationally, after September of 2006 home prices peaked. By late 2006 and into 2007, home prices then declined. By

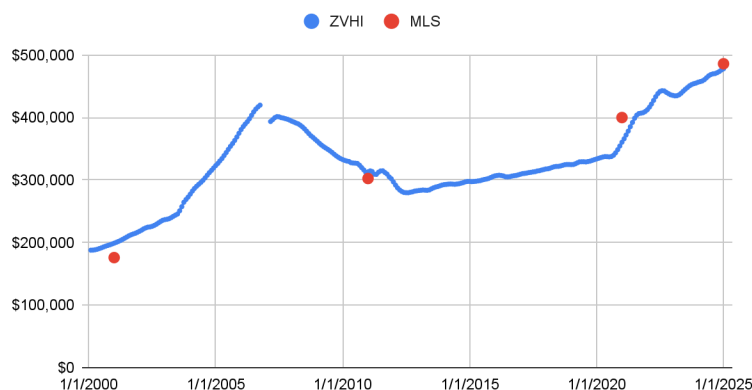
2008, the housing market had fully collapsed leading to a broader financial crisis. The period between 2007 and 2009 was known as the Great Recession. The housing market bottomed out in 2012 and thereafter the market experienced a slow recovery through 2016.

Talbot County showed a similar pattern. Figure 33 shows the ZHVI from January of 2000 through December of 2024<sup>2</sup>. At the end of September 2006, the ZHVI for the County peaked at \$420,000. From September 2006 through 2009, the ZHVI dropped 21 percent. By September of 2012, the ZHVI bottomed out at \$280,000. Thereafter, Talbot County showed a steady increase in the ZHVI. By the end of 2019, the index rose 19 percent to a value of \$334,000. From the beginning of 2015 through 2019, the ZHVI rose at an average annual rate of 2.4 percent. However, the ZHVI then accelerated from the beginning of 2020 where home values rose 43 percent to \$478,000 at the end of 2024. This represents an average yearly rate increase of approximately 9 percent since 2020.

While the ZHVI is a useful tool for understanding general trends in Talbot County, it's important to note that the ZVHI is not a substitute for professional home value appraisals. The ZHVI also tends to be more accurate in areas with strong housing data. Therefore, to assess the general accuracy of the index, other sources of information should be considered.

This report reviewed the median sold price of homes in Talbot County in 2000, 2010, 2020, and 2024 using Bright MLS statistics provided by the Mid-Shore Board of Realtors. The values were then mapped in Figure 34 below and compared to the ZHVI. The chart shows that both followed the same trend from 2000 to 2024. In addition, Table 4 shows the percentage differences between ZHVI and MLS data,

Figure 34: Talbot County ZVHI versus MLS



which ranged from a high of 13% in 2000 to a low of 2% in 2024. The average difference was 7%. This suggests that the ZHVI is reasonably accurate and can be relied on as a valid source of capturing the general trend of home values in Talbot County. In addition, the MLS values may not capture all housing transactions such as homes sold by the owner. There may also be delays in

<sup>2</sup> The ZHVI was not available from October 2006 through January 2007.

the sale prices of homes sold during any one year from new construction. In conclusion, there is confidence that both the ZHVI (in addition to MLS data) is a good source of information to measure home values and trends over time.

**Table 5: Talbot County ZHVI vs. MLS and Percentage Difference**

	2000	2010	2020	2024
<b>ZHVI</b>	\$199,078	\$313,231	\$360,581	\$478,000
<b>MLS</b>	\$176,000	\$302,500	\$400,000	\$486,000
<b>% Difference</b>	13%	3.5%	10%	2%

**B. Prices: Easton Median Values**

Figure 35 compares the ZHVI and MLS data of home values in Easton from the years 2000 through 2024. Two things are notable. First, the trend of home values during that time was similar to Talbot County. Second, the average percentage difference in these two sources of data (7%) confirms confidence in the use of the ZHVI for Easton.

Figure 36 shows the ZHVI in specific years. Home values in Easton have risen 131 percent since 2000. The largest increase was between 2000 and 2010 when home values rose 52 percent. Between 2010 and 2020, the increase in Easton home values slowed to 17 percent, most likely due to the effects of the Great Recession and its slow recovery. Even so, the impact of the recession on median home values was not negatively impacted; suggesting that high-end sales for wealthier buyers may have been less affected by the recession compared to households within lower-tier incomes.

Figure 35: Easton ZHVI versus MLS

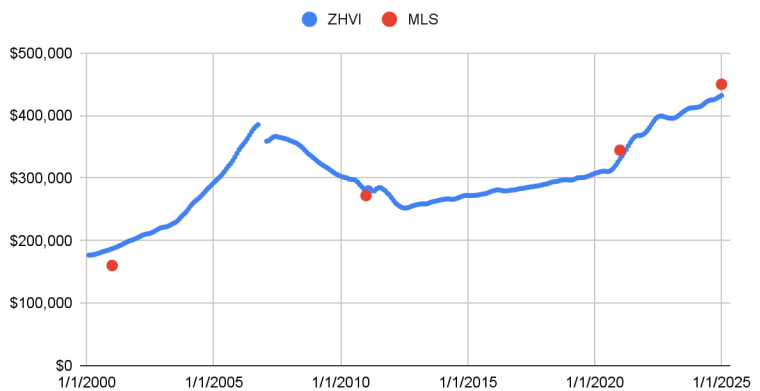
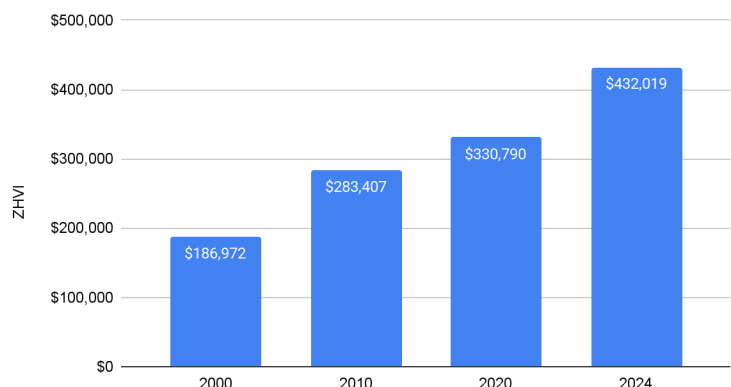


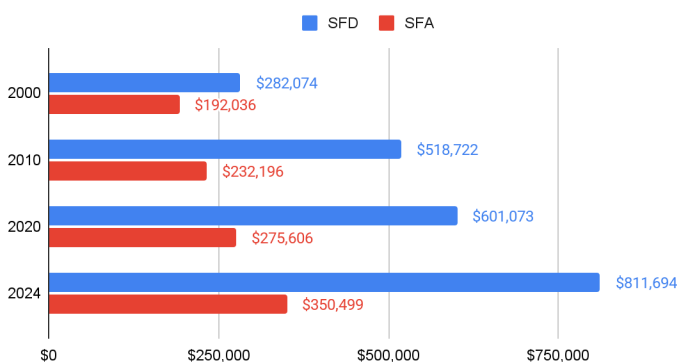
Figure 36: Easton ZHVI: 2000 - 20204



However, since 2020, home values in Easton have risen 31 percent. Even more concerning when related to affordability is that the typical home value of the least expensive homes at the end of 2024, or those homes in the 5th to 35th percentile, was \$300,269<sup>3</sup>. In other words, the least expensive homes in Easton are out of reach for most households making less than 100% of Easton’s 2024 AMI of approximately \$98,000 for a family of four, including first-time homebuyers (see Section Four).

### C. Prices: Easton Average Sales Prices

Figure 37: Average Home Sales Price: Easton, 2000 - 2024, Bright MLS



While median home values are a more accurate representation of typical home prices, average home values can provide insights into home value trends as well. Figure 37 shows the average home price of homes sold over time in Easton for detached units and attached units such as townhomes. For attached units, the chart shows the average sales price rose 21 percent from 2000 to 2010

and 19 percent from 2010 to 2020. The increase in the average sales price, however, increased 27 percent from 2000 to 2024, outpacing the prior decades. A fairly consistent increase in average sales prices for attached units across the decades suggests steady demand, but a potentially limited supply for this type of housing in Easton. In addition, the steady growth in the average sales price over the decades, although not as dramatic as single-family detached homes (see below), poses affordability challenges for those households seeking this particular housing type.

The percentage increases are far more dramatic for detached units. From 2000 to 2010, the percentage increase in sales price was 84 percent. This was likely due to the housing boom prior to the housing crisis that led to the Great Recession. Average home values still increased between 2010 and 2020, although at a much lower percentage of 16 percent. Since 2020, average home values accelerated their increase to 35 percent. This sharp increase from the prior decade indicates a renewed acceleration in home price growth for single-family detached units, with

<sup>3</sup> ZHVI All Homes - Bottom Tier Time Series (\$).

some of this occurring during a period of lower interest rates and during the pandemic. It will be interesting to observe the effect more recent higher interest rates may have on home sales prices for these types of units.

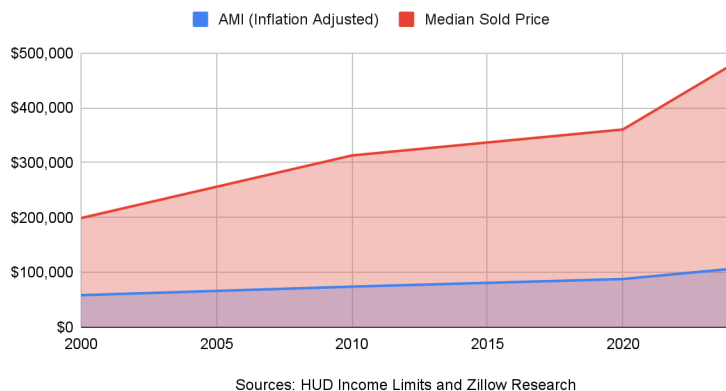
In summary, the high costs of single-family detached units in Easton raises serious concerns about housing affordability for these types of units, especially for first time buyers and those in professions with lower annual wage pay and limited opportunities for income growth.

#### D. Housing Costs and Income

In 2024, Talbot County’s Annual Median Income (AMI) was \$106,500. Each year, the Easton Affordable Housing Board adjusts the County’s AMI to reflect more accurately the median income for Easton residents. In 2020, Easton AMI was \$98,065. Given the fairly small difference, the Home price to Income Ratio for Talbot County can be a key measure of housing affordability in Easton. Using the median sold price data provided by the MSBR, the ratio in 2024 was 4.4; or the number of years it takes to buy a median-priced home in Talbot County. In 2000, the ratio was 3.03. This increase means that housing affordability has declined significantly since 2000. Even after the Great Recession, the ratio increased to 4.12.

Another useful tool is to measure whether income has kept pace with housing costs over time. Figure 38 compares the growth rates of income in Talbot County versus home prices from 2000 to 2024. Table 6 shows the percentage increase in income

Figure 38: Talbot County AMI (Inflation Adjusted) and ZHVI



growth and home price growth over the time intervals. From 2000 to 2010, home prices significantly outpaced income growth, resulting in a rapid decline of affordability. This may have been due to the housing boom up until the housing crash that led to the Great Recession. The rate of growth for both income and home prices slowed down during the next decade and

income growth slightly outpaced home growth, most likely due to the post recession impacts and the slowdown in the Easton housing market. However, in the most recent period from 2000 to 2024, home price growth has again surpassed income growth which means affordability issues, or a lack of more affordable

housing, has again become an issue; like that seen in the decade from 2000 to 2010.

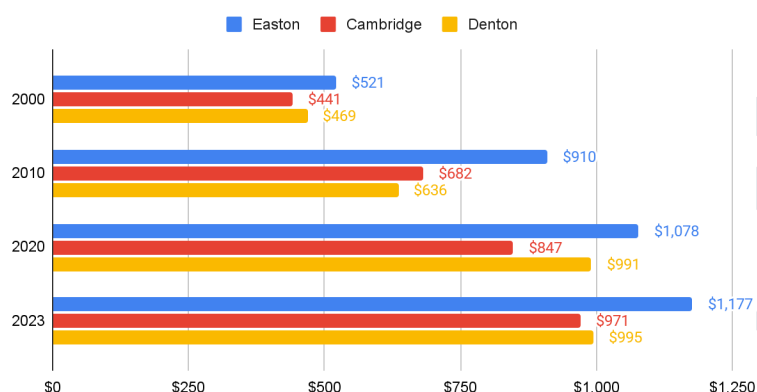
**Table 6: Percentages of Income Growth versus Home Price Growth, Talbot County**

Year	2000-2010	2010-2020	2020-2024
<b>Income Growth</b>	26.63%	18.69%	21.20%
<b>Home Price Growth</b>	57.34%	15.12%	32.56%

### E. Rental Market

In Easton, 40 percent of occupied households are renters. This number is down five percentage points from 2010. The rental vacancy rate is 5.3 percent, a statistically significant difference than the homeowner vacancy rate of 1.4 percent<sup>4</sup>. In 2010, the homeowner vacancy rate was 5.2 percent and the rental vacancy rate was 4.8 percent.

Figure 39: Median Gross Rent, 2000 - 2023



For owner-occupied housing, the extremely low vacancy rate indicates a very tight market that may be reflected by the demand for higher-end housing and a limited

supply of more affordable and varied housing types; consistent with the trend of rising home prices. The aging of the population and out-migration of younger adults may have also contributed to the drop in the vacancy rate since 2010; older adults are more likely to be homeowners while younger adults face challenges with entering the homeowner market.

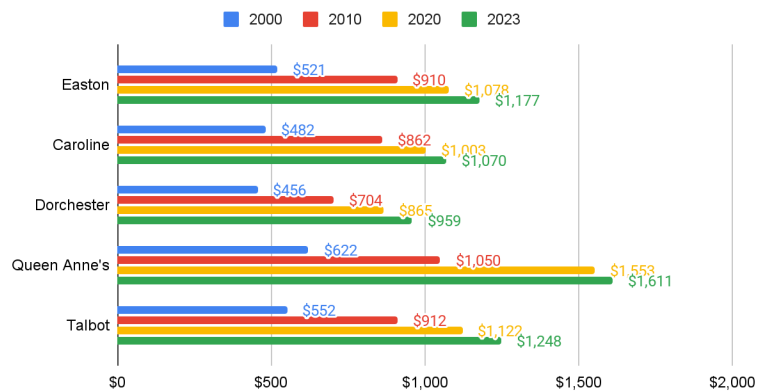
The rental vacancy rate is on the healthy side of supply and demand (normally considered within a range of 5 to 7 percent) and indicates more unit availability in the market compared to for-sale homes.

The recent increase of multi-family residential in the pipeline may help towards balancing the rising price trend of both the homeownership and rental markets

<sup>4</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *Comparative Housing Characteristics* (ACS 5-Year Estimates Comparison Profiles).

given: a) the slower absorption of housing units since 2010, b) the tighter market for homeownership, and c) the tendency towards higher priced homeownership inventory. More multi-family housing units provide alternative options for housing for those households that cannot afford to purchase a home in Easton. They also provide a greater supply of rental units in the market to stabilize or even decrease rents and subsequently affordability for renters.

Figure 40: Median Gross Rent, Easton Versus Counties, 2023

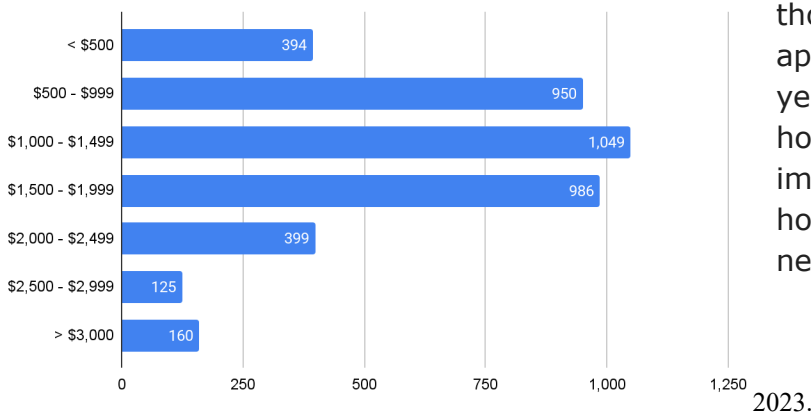


Since 2000, Easton’s median gross rent for occupied rental units has exceeded those of Denton and Cambridge. This consistency demonstrates that Easton has long had a more premium rental market when compared to these other two neighboring communities. The biggest increase in Easton was the period between 2000 and 2010 when median rents increased 74 percent. During this period, 92 percent of the units constructed were single-family detached and attached units. The demand for rental housing, and the limited supply, could have been factors in the large increase in median rent in that decade. While the largest increase occurred between 2000 and 2010, rents continued to rise in the following decade and through 2023<sup>5</sup>.

When comparing with the adjacent counties, Easton’s median rent is 94% of Talbot County’s but is only 73 percent of Queen Anne’s.

When broken down by gross ranges, there are significantly fewer rental options affordable to extremely lower-income households, or those making less than approximately \$25,000 per year. The limited availability of housing at this rent includes impacts to those at-risk of homelessness and those in need of “transitional housing”.

Figure 41: Easton Gross Rent and Number of Units, 2023



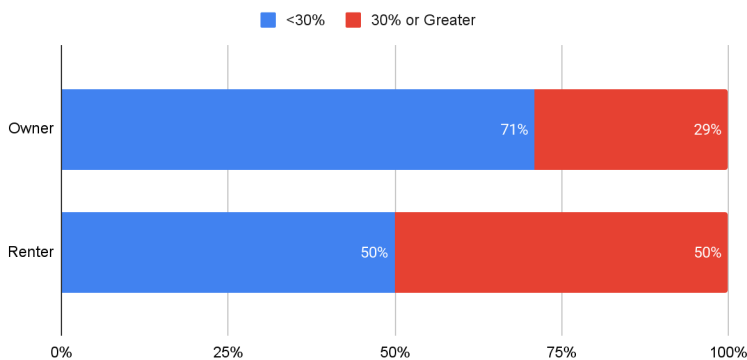
There are a relatively substantial number of units in the \$500 - \$999 price range, which are affordable to households earning less than approximately \$45,000 per year.

## HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

### A. Cost Burdened Households

Cost-burdened households are those that spend a disproportionate amount of their income on housing costs. This financial strain can limit their ability to afford other necessities. Families can be forced to choose between paying their mortgage and paying for other necessities like food, healthcare, transportation, and savings; impacting their overall well-being. A household that spends more than 30% of their gross income on housing is considered cost burdened.

Figure 42: Easton Cost Burdened Households by Tenure, 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates



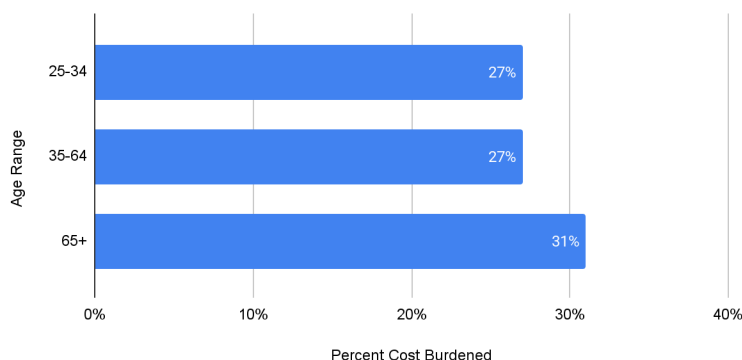
According to 2023 ACS data, 50 percent of occupied households with a mortgage in Easton spend \$2,000 or more on monthly housing costs. However, only 29 percent of these homeowners are considered cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. This suggests a relatively high tolerance for housing costs in

Easton.

However, this also indicates that housing costs in Easton are relatively high, even for those considered middle-income. At 80 percent of Easton's 2024 Area Median Income (AMI) of \$98,065, a household should ideally spend no more than \$1,961 per month on housing to avoid being cost burdened. The fact that many homeowners are exceeding this threshold while remaining below the 30% cost-burdened threshold suggests that middle-income households may still be feeling the squeeze and facing affordability challenges when seeking housing in Easton. Indeed, ACA data shows that 62 percent of owner-occupied households making less than \$75,000 in income in the last 12 months are cost-burdened compared to 9 percent of households making \$75,000 or more.

While middle-income homeowners are feeling the squeeze in Easton's housing market, the situation is even more dire for renters, especially those with lower incomes. In 2023, 50 percent of renters were cost-burdened compared to 29 percent of homeowners – a significant difference. This disparity highlights the greater affordability challenges faced by renters in Easton, who are more likely to be spending a disproportionate amount of their income on housing. This can have serious implications for financial stability, housing security, and overall well-being.

Figure 43: Cost Burdened Owner Households by Age of Household Head, 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

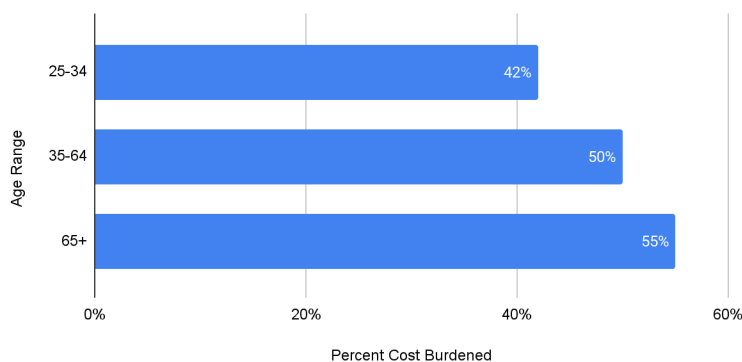


ACA data shows 69 percent of renter households making less than \$75,000 in income in the last 12 months are cost burdened. For renter households making less than \$50,000 in the last 12 months, the percentage is 83 percent.

The cost burden for both renters and owners also generally increases with age. Older households, especially renters, appear to be

particularly vulnerable to housing cost burden. This could be due to fixed incomes, rising healthcare costs, the death of a spouse or significant other, or other financial pressures associated with aging. While cost burden is high across all renter age groups, even younger renters (25-34) are significantly burdened. This could impact their ability to save for a down payment and achieve homeownership, invest in their future, or meet other financial goals.

Figure 44: Cost Burdened Renter Households By Age of Household Head, 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



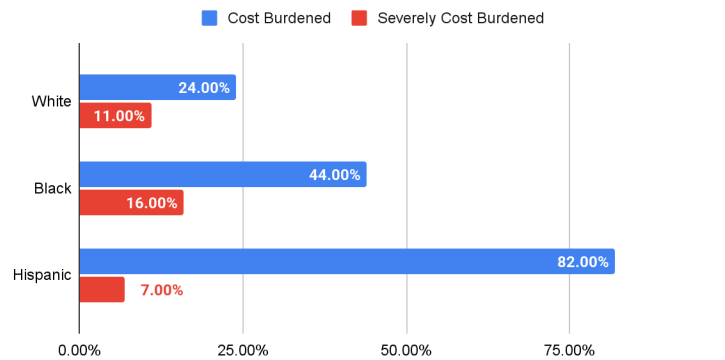
When looking at cost burdened owner and renter households by race, Figures 45 and 46 show significant racial disparities in Easton, with Hispanic households facing the most severe challenges.

White homeowners have the lowest cost burden (24%), followed by Black homeowners (44%), with Hispanic homeowners experiencing the

highest cost burden (82%). While Hispanic homeowners have the highest overall

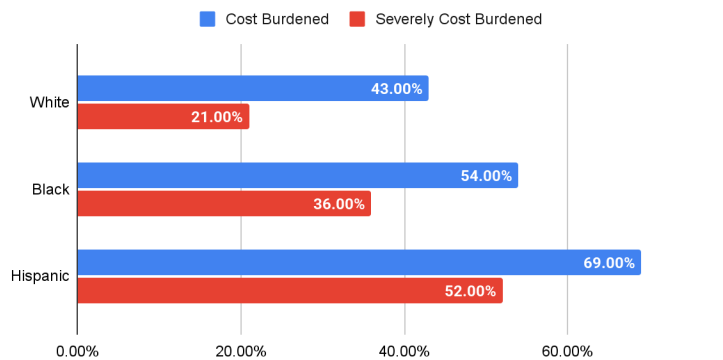
cost burden, Black homeowners have a higher percentage of those who are severely cost burdened; defined as spending 50 percent or more of their gross income on housing.

Figure 45: Cost Burdened Owner Households by Race, 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



White renters have the lowest cost burden (43%), followed by Black renters (54%), with Hispanic renters again experiencing the highest cost burden (69%). Hispanic renters also have the highest percentage of those who are severely cost burdened (52%). Black renters also have a high percentage of severely cost burdened households (36%). Across all racial groups, renters experience higher rates of cost burden than owners, further emphasizing the affordability challenges faced by renters in Easton.

Figure 46: Cost Burdened Renter Households by Race, 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



These disparities strongly suggest the presence of systemic inequities in Easton's housing market due at least in part to a lack of access to affordable housing. Hispanic households, both owners and renters, appear to be particularly vulnerable to housing cost burden. This could be due to factors such as lower median incomes, limited access to credit, or language barriers. Black homeowners and renters have higher percentages of severe cost burden, indicating that they not only struggle to afford housing but also face significant financial strain as a result. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to also address racial disparities in housing cost burden in Easton to address the specific challenges faced by different racial groups and promote equitable access to affordable housing.

## B. Affordable Home Price

According to the annual Income Limits Summary published by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the FY 2024 Median Family Income (MFI) for Talbot County is \$106,500 for a family of four.<sup>6</sup> The County's MFI is 11 percent higher than the average County MFI for the eastern shore of Maryland (excluding Cecil County) and third highest on the eastern shore, below the counties of Queen Anne's and Kent.

Figure 47: Talbot County Median Family Income, HUD Income Limits

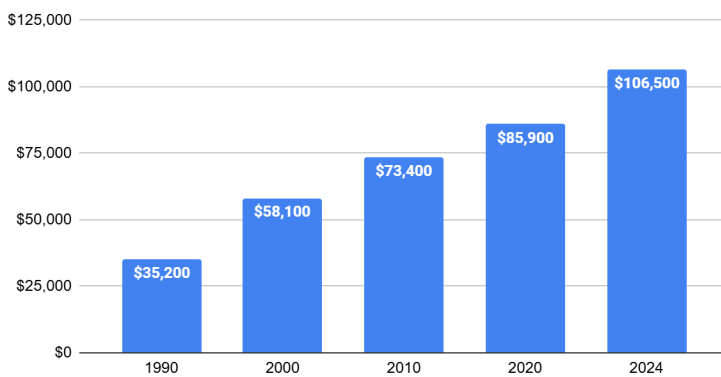


Figure 47 shows the historical growth in Talbot County's MFI. Since 1990, Talbot County families' earnings have increased, showing the overall improvement of economic growth for families. The highest decade of growth was between 1990 and 2000 where the County's MFI grew 65 percent. From 1990 to 2024, the County's MFI grew 203

percent.

Using statutory intent and requirements, HUD calculates income limits based on household size and categorizes these limits as Extremely Low Income, Very Low Income, and Low Income. The Summary Table for Talbot County (Table 2 below) income limits are listed in Table 2 below.

The income limits and household sizes based on the MFI are then used by HUD to determine eligibility for assisted housing programs including Public Housing; Section 8 project-based; Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher; Section 202 housing for the elderly; and Section 811 housing for persons with disabilities programs.

It's important to note that the Easton Affordable Housing Board (Board) uses a formula to adjust Talbot County's MFI when determining affordability limits for Town of Easton housing programs. This adjustment is done to reflect differences in median income between the Town and Talbot County. For FY 2024, the Town's adjusted MFI is \$98,065.

<sup>6</sup> This number was calculated using the 5-year 2018-2022 American Community Survey MFY estimate (\$100,321) with an inflation factor adjustment based on the Congressional Budget office projection of the national Consumer Price Index. The resulting number was then rounded to the nearest \$100.

**Table 7: HUD FY 2024 Income Limits Summary**

FY 2024 Income Limit Area	Median Family Income <a href="#">Click for More Detail</a>	FY 2024 Income Limit Category	Persons in Family							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Talbot County, MD	\$106,500	Very Low (50%) Income Limits (\$) <a href="#">Click for More Detail</a>	37,300	42,600	47,950	<b>53,250</b>	57,550	61,800	66,050	70,300
		Extremely Low Income Limits (\$)* <a href="#">Click for More Detail</a>	22,400	25,600	28,800	<b>31,950</b>	36,580	41,960	47,340	52,720
		Low (80%) Income Limits (\$) <a href="#">Click for More Detail</a>	59,650	68,200	76,700	<b>85,200</b>	92,050	98,850	105,650	112,500

A four-person family earning 100% of the 2024 Talbot County Area Median Income, adjusted for Easton, paying 35% of their monthly gross household income for mortgage principal, interest, property taxes, and property insurance (PITI); Private Mortgage Insurance (PMI); and Home Owner Association (HOA) dues, together with a 5% down payment (assuming a 6.95% 30-year fixed mortgage rate), can afford a home at a sales price of \$277,000<sup>7</sup>.

According to a 2024 ©MarketStats by Showing Time report provided by the Mid-Shore Board of Realtors, the median sold price for an Easton home in 2024 was \$450,000. The affordable sales price of \$277,000 is 38 percent lower than the 2024 median sales price.

Table 8 also shows that even the average sold price for an attached home, such as a townhome, exceeded the maximum affordable price for a family of four earning 100% of Easton’s AMI by 21 percent. To afford a home valued at \$420,000, a four-person household would need to earn 140 percent of Easton AMI, or approximately \$137,000 in annual income.

**Table 8: Easton Maximum Affordable Sales Price vs. Median and Average Sold Price**

<b>Maximum Affordable Sales Price (Family of Four @ 100% AMI)</b>	Median Sold Price	Average Sold Price	Average Attached Sold Price	Average Detached Sold Price
<b>\$277,000</b>	\$450,000	\$736,186	\$350,499	\$811,964

<sup>7</sup> HOA and property insurance fees are each assumed at \$200 per month. Real property taxes are calculated with a factor of 1.29 per \$100 based on an assessed value of \$419,647, which is a 3-year trailing average of the ZHVI. PMI is based on a credit score in the 660 - 679 range at 1.23% of the loan amount annually. The interest rate is based on the Freddie Mac Priority Mortgage Market Survey U.S. weekly averages for a 30-yr FRM as of 2/01/2025.

### C. Affordable Rental Price

HUD also calculates Fair Market Rents (FMRs) to determine payment standard amounts for various housing rental programs including the Housing Choice Voucher Program. For Talbot County, the FMRs are calculated starting with a base rent using the average of 2018-2022 ACS estimates, multiplied by adjustment factors to determine the FY 25 FMR. This number is then adjusted if it falls below the Maryland state minimum and then calculates bedroom ratios and multiplies these by the adjusted two-bedroom rent to produce FMRs for unit sizes other than two bedrooms. The FMRs for unit sizes based on the number of bedrooms is listed in Table 7 below.

**Table 9: FY 2025 FMRs by Unit Bedrooms**

	<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>One-Bedroom</b>	<b>Two-Bedroom</b>	<b>Three-Bedroom</b>	<b>Four-Bedroom</b>
FY 2025 FMR	\$1,210	\$1,257	\$1,392	\$1,951	\$2,338

A renter household is cost-burdened if they pay more than 30% of their gross income on rent. For renters paying 30% of their monthly gross income on rent, net of an assumed monthly utility allowance of \$100, a household of four earning 60% of Easton’s AMI (\$58,839) can afford a rent of about \$1,371 for a three bedroom apartment.

Zumper reports that the average monthly rent as of March 2025 for a three-bedroom rental is \$2,400, which is 10 percent higher than the previous year in Easton. 75 percent of rents range from \$1,501 to \$3,000<sup>8</sup>. The median rent for a two-bedroom is \$2,499. For all bedroom counts, the median monthly rent is \$2,549, which is 27% higher than the national average. For apartments, the average rent price is \$2,699<sup>9</sup>. The average monthly rent for a 2-bedroom apartment is \$2,044.

Table 9 below shows that a family of four making 60% of Easton’s AMI cannot afford to rent a one, two, or three bedroom apartment in Easton without being cost burdened. To afford a median monthly rent of \$2,525, a household will need to earn at least 110% of Easton’s AMI without being cost-burdened.

<sup>8</sup> Median rent and rent ranges are based on Zumper inventory in the last 30 days.

<sup>9</sup> The average excludes rentals for rooms, condos, and homes.

**Table 10: Easton Maximum Affordable Rental Price vs. Median and Average Rental Price**

<b>Maximum Affordable Rental Price (Family of Four @ 60% AMI)</b>	Median Rental Price	Median Rental Price 2-Bedroom	Median Rental Price 3-Bedroom	Average Rental Price - Apartment
<b>\$1,471</b>	\$2,549	\$2,499	\$2,400	\$2,674

**EXCLUSIONARY ZONING**

Exclusionary zoning refers to zoning regulations designed to limit the types of housing and land uses within a specific area, oftentimes for what are seemingly good reasons. This is often achieved through policies and regulations like minimum lot and building sizes, restrictions on multi-family housing, building height limitations, all of which can increase housing costs and reduce the affordability of housing. However, the unintended effect is the exclusion of certain demographics, particularly lower-income individuals and families, from those areas.

Take for example a legally created lot that is a minimum of one-half an acre, situated within a zoning district specifically designated for single-family residences with minimum lot sizes per dwelling unit. The buyer of that lot has several theoretical construction options: a) a modest 1,200 sq. ft. starter home catering to first-time homebuyers or a re-starter home for a retiree on a fixed income looking to downsize, b) the more dense option of seven townhomes that could provide more affordable entry-level housing, or c) a sprawling very large home designed for affluent buyers. While the developer of that lot would likely realize a significantly higher overall revenue by constructing and selling three townhomes, the existing zoning regulations strictly preclude this higher-density housing type; either by requiring larger minimum lot sizes, smaller lot coverages, lower densities, prohibiting varying housing types or a combination of these restrictions. These regulations, perhaps intended to maintain a certain low-density character within the neighborhood, effectively limit the developer's options. Consequently, in order to maximize their profit within the permissible constraints<sup>10</sup>, the developer will almost certainly choose to build a very large home, likely incorporating high-end amenities and finishes to appeal to a specific, wealthier segment of the market and achieve a sizable profit on a single unit. While each townhome might have yielded a smaller individual profit, the total of seven units would likely generate significantly higher overall revenue compared to a single large home.

<sup>10</sup> The permissible regulatory constraints which limit profit are on top of additional soft and hard costs for land use approvals, permitting and impact fees, and construction.

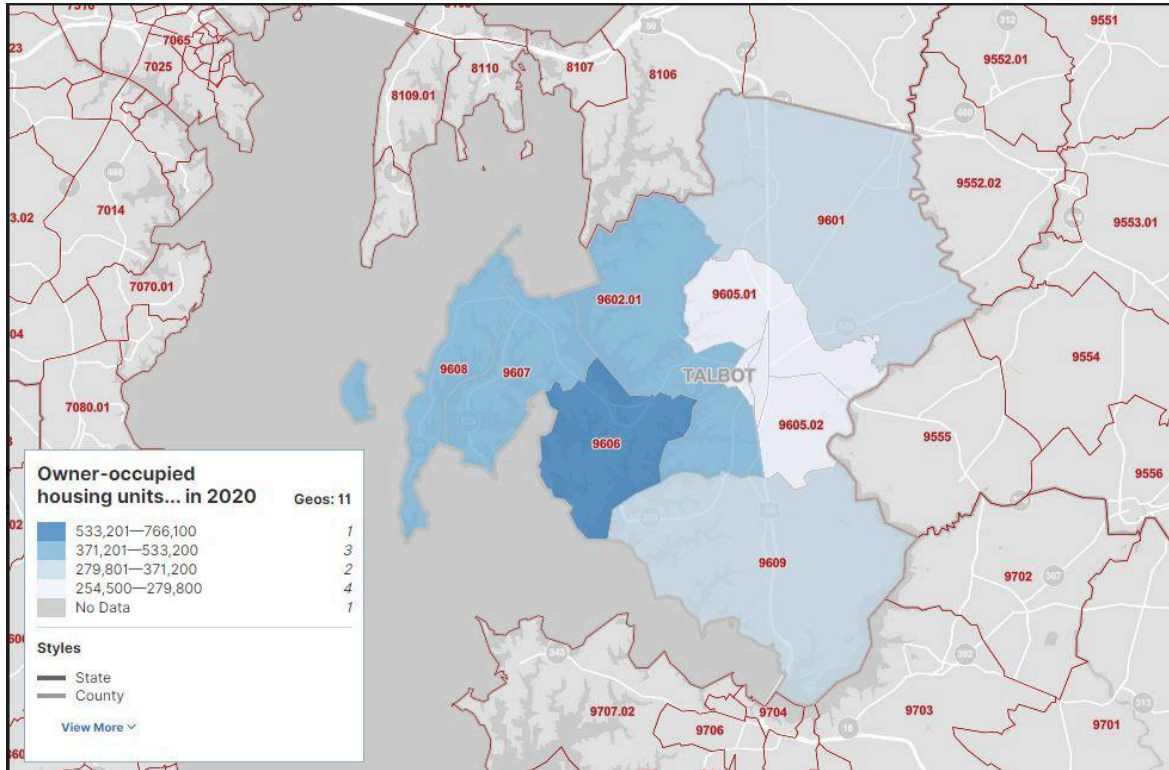
The type of housing a community aspires to isn't necessarily the housing a community needs. While there is undoubtedly a market for larger and more affluent homes in Easton and Talbot County, catering to established families and retirees seeking spacious properties, there is also a likely demand from essential workers, young professionals, growing families seeking affordable homeownership, and empty nesters desiring less upkeep, to reside in neighborhoods with a mix and choice of housing. The key is ensuring these diverse housing types are of an appropriate scale and character with each other.

This scenario highlights how zoning, while intended to guide development, can inadvertently shape the types of housing available and potentially impact affordability and community diversity. There are virtually no opportunities for more affordable housing in the unincorporated areas of Talbot County. The County's comprehensive plan places high value on the protection of the shoreline, waterway, and agricultural lands, equally important goals as affordable housing. The County's plan to accomplish this is twofold: restrict the extension of sewer outside of development and growth areas that surround the towns and to take a restrictive and exclusionary approach toward the use of land over which it has zoning authority.

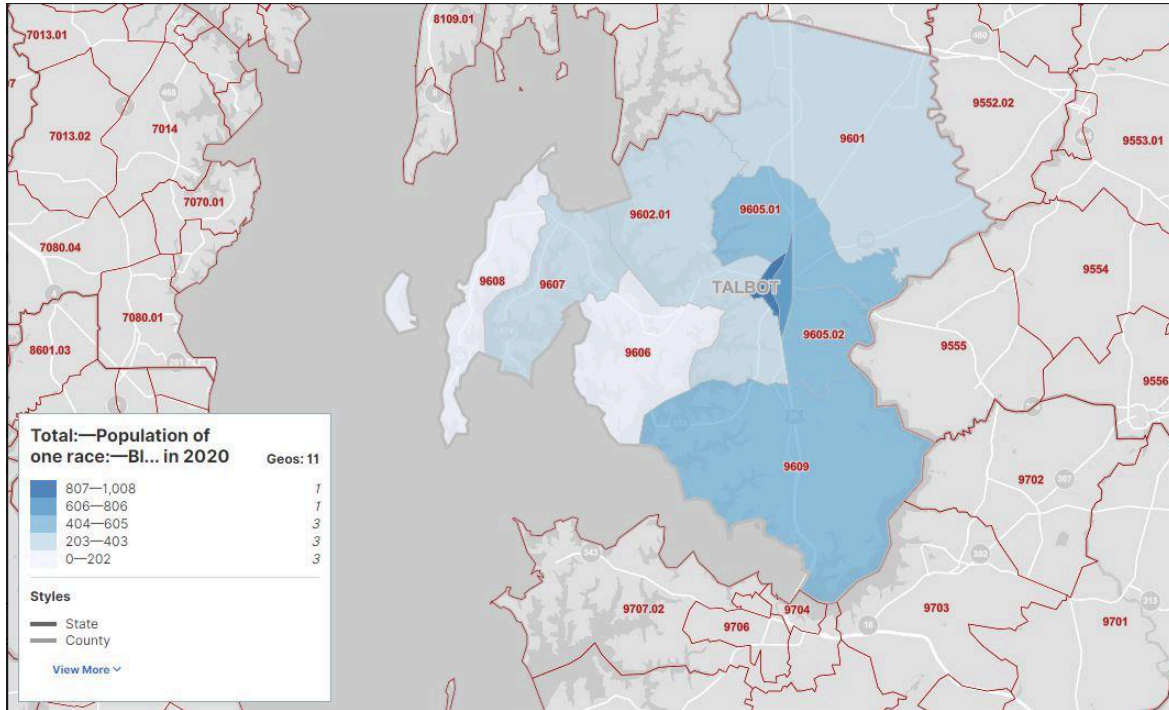
To implement these objectives, the County's zoning regulations prohibit all housing types except primarily single-family detached housing, which limits housing options. The zoning districts are characterized as very low density, further augmented by low maximum height restrictions. The bulk requirements for each lot include large minimum lot sizes and low maximum lot coverage requirements, which makes real estate more scarce and increases construction costs and land prices.

The end effect is housing segregation due to the cost of land and development supporting only new higher-end housing in the unincorporated areas of Talbot County. And as the graphics show below, housing segregation is the door to other types of segregation (see Figures 47, 48, and 49 below).

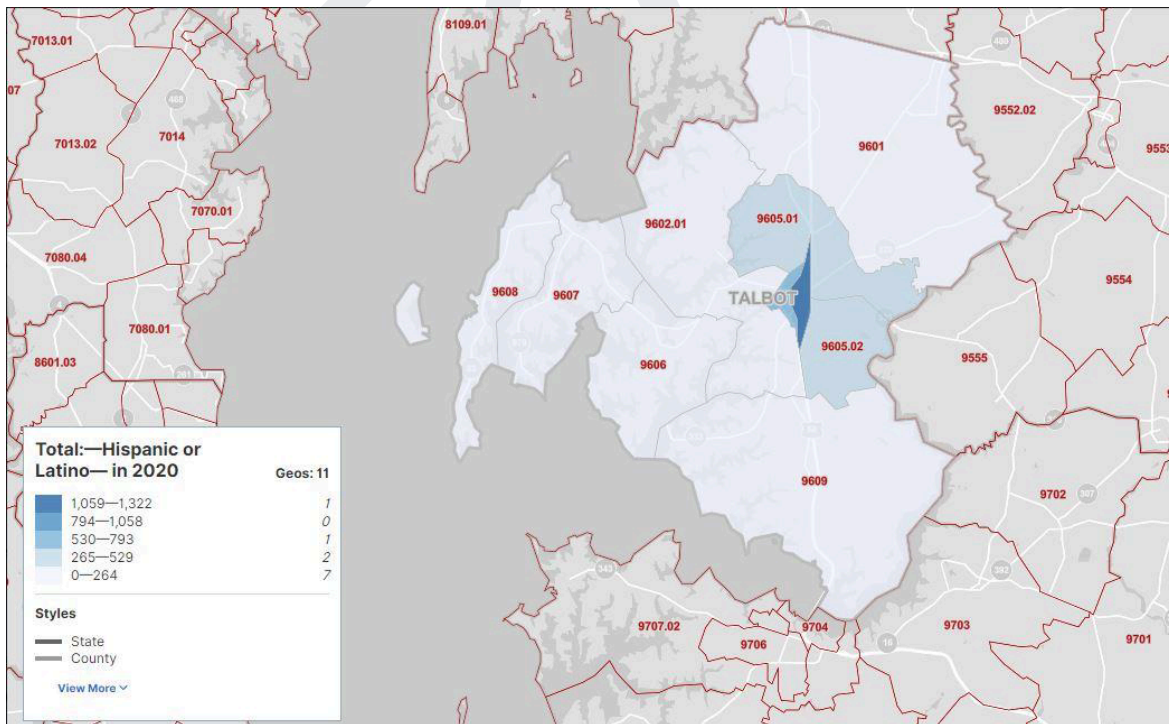
**Figure 47: Talbot County Median Value of Owner-Occupied Housing Units in 2020 by Census Tract**



**Figure 48: Talbot County Black Population by Census Tract**



**Figure 49: Talbot County Hispanic Population by Census Tract**



As for the remaining towns outside of Easton, there are extremely limited areas for future growth and development adjacent to Oxford and St. Michaels. While Lakeside at Trappe, the new development in the Town of Trappe, will eventually provide approximately 2,500 homes, the approval of the Planned Unit Development by the Town of Trappe did not require any proffers for affordable or workforce housing.

The cumulative effect of exclusionary zoning comes with negative consequences:

- **Displacement** as lower-earning households are forced to move out of Easton and Talbot County altogether
- **Economic segregation** with wealthier residents living in separate neighborhoods with better amenities
- **Reduced individuality** resulting from displacement as lower income residents are forced out of the community
- **Negative impacts on businesses and the local economy** as the displacement of lower-income workers and the inability of essential workers to live in Easton leads to labor shortages and the difficulty to attract and retain businesses
- **Homogenization** from the influx of higher-income residents and the loss of local businesses and cultural offerings that cater to a diverse population

## **POTENTIAL NEW HOUSING PROGRAMS/POLICIES**

There are two distinctly different housing problems in Easton. One is the lack of housing for individuals/families of low or extremely low income. Oftentimes the problems of this economic group are closely related to other social and/or familial problems. As such, we will likely always have this housing problem to deal with. In the meantime, the Town should continue and expand its efforts to provide housing for this group. The Housing Authority will continue to be the leading provider of this service. In addition, the Town should support the efforts of Habitat for Humanity of Choptank, Inc and encourage any similar groups in their efforts to provide more safe, decent and affordable housing in Easton.

One such similar effort that was at one time discussed in Easton is the establishment of a Self-help Housing Program. This program would be modeled after a highly successful one that operates on the lower Eastern Shore under the direction of former MD State Delegate Rudy Cane. Self-help housing is similar to the Habitat model. It has been described by the USDA as a program used primarily to help very low- and low-income households construct their own homes. The program is targeted to families who are unable to buy clean, safe housing through conventional methods. Families participating in a mutual self-help project perform a minimum amount (for example 65 percent) of the construction labor on each other's homes under qualified supervision. The savings from the reduction in labor costs allows otherwise ineligible families to own their homes. If families cannot meet their mortgage payments during the construction phase, the funds for these payments can be included in the loan. The Town attempted to obtain funding to establish a local version of this Program through the initial Community Legacy Program. Unfortunately this aspect of the Town's request was not funded at that time.

The second aspect of housing that is a problem in Easton is the availability of housing for the first time homebuyer and the move-up homebuyer. Increasingly, subdivisions in Easton are targeting the upper levels of the market and opportunities for people in this market are disappearing.

Compounding the general lack of housing in the lower income markets is the fact that what housing there is available for this segment of the population is segregated. Easton is becoming a collection of income-segregated developments, where the very poor live in one area, the blue-collar workers in another area, and higher income residents live yet somewhere else, and never the twain shall meet. As was discussed in the Community Character Element, this is undesirable for our community.

One way to combat this situation is to require that all residential

development contain a minimum percentage of housing at various price points. Something along this line was originally proposed in the Easton Village on the Tred Avon project. In this case the developer set aside 10% of both the single family attached and detached units for “affordable” housing. Furthermore, the developer promised that these units would be indistinguishable from the market rate houses and that they would be incorporated amongst these units throughout the development (i.e. they will not be isolated and segregated). There is even a resale provision such that the units could not be resold for more than was paid for them plus an annual appreciation factor. Over the development of this project though, this original affordable housing proposal came to be replaced by contributions to the Town’s Affordable Housing Fund in lieu of constructing the units within Easton Village. One of the primary reasons for the change was that while the units may have been initially affordable, they resulted in a large financial burden to these homeowners in the form of the real estate tax bills and Homeowners Association dues.

Another option that has been used from time to time is to require developers to either contribute to an Affordable Housing Fund or to construct affordable housing units off-site from their project. At least some of the affordable units originally required to be built in Easton Village were subsequently provided by a variation of this alternative.

The desire to replicate this program more uniformly across the Town in virtually all development projects is what led the Affordable Housing Board to consider Inclusionary Zoning for Easton. The 2010 Plan Update stated in its Housing Element, on this issue of Inclusionary Zoning, “As this [lack of affordable housing] is as much, if not more, of a problem today as it was in 2004, work should continue towards the development and adoption of a workable Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance.”

Such work has continued. Through the initial efforts of Easton’s Affordable

Housing Board, to the Attainable Housing Task Force, the possibility, benefits and challenges of adopting an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance have been analyzed and debated. The outcome of this effort is a proposed Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance currently (as of 2/12/25) pending before the Easton Town Council.

## **HOUSING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Goal: To ensure that housing in Easton is safe, sanitary, structurally sound and safeguards or upgrades neighborhood design.

Objectives:

- ☞ Continue to adequately fund, staff, and train the Town Building Inspection Department and strengthen the Town's Rental Housing Inspection Program.
- ☞ Partner with state, county and non-profit agencies to direct available housing rehabilitation funds to qualifying low and moderate income households.
- ☞ Establish design standards and require physical distribution of different housing types that provide visual interest and a smooth blend of affordable housing in the community.
- ☞ Achieve a density that creates a sense of place, uses infrastructure efficiently, produces pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods and accommodates plans for transit.
- ☞ Provide open spaces; use landscaping to accentuate the natural environment and give visual connectivity; preserve natural assets, community identity and environmental and health standards.

Goal: To increase the supply of low-income housing in the Town of Easton.

Objectives:

- ☞ Support the efforts of the Talbot Housing Authority and the Easton Affordable Housing Board to provide both home-ownership and rental

opportunities for individuals/families of low income.

- ☞ Consider amendments to the Easton Zoning Ordinance to make the development of apartments more attractive to private sector developers and to allow flexibility in rehabilitating existing and/or historic buildings for an alternative use.
- ☞ Work in partnership with Habitat for Humanity of Choptank, Inc (or any similar organization) to find sites for new homes.
- ☞ Establish a Town-initiated self-help housing program.
- ☞ Insure the development of Smart Neighborhoods by encouraging and facilitating new infill development, including manufactured homes, on vacant or underutilized land within areas currently served by adequate infrastructure and public facilities.
- ☞ Institute some form of Inclusionary Zoning.

Goal: To insure a more heterogeneous mix of price points in future residential projects.

Objectives:

- ☞ Provide density bonuses in projects for the inclusion of low and moderate-income housing units.
- ☞ Adopt an Inclusionary Zoning or Affordable Dwelling Unit Ordinance whereby all residential developments will be required to provide a minimum number of units at various price points.

Goal: To partner in a countywide affordable housing effort.

Objectives:

- ☞ Participate in a Joint Commission with Talbot County and the other towns and unincorporated villages to initiate and implement a coordinated countywide affordable housing program.

- ☞ Support the creation of a county wide Housing Trust Fund to help provide homes for low-income residents.
- ☞ Investigate ways in which Easton may continue to house the majority of affordable housing in Talbot County (since this is where the infrastructure exists), but at the same time the County might contribute towards this effort as a way of satisfying their obligation to address this issue.

#### POSSIBLE OTHER GOALS:

- Increasing overall supply of housing.
  - Removing regulatory barriers to home construction.
  - Providing financial relief (i.e., reduced or waived permit fees, impact fees, capital charges, etc.) pursuant to provision of certain types and amounts of housing.
- Incentivizing increased variety of housing types.

## COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

### INTRODUCTION

Community Facilities and Services includes the basic infrastructure of the Town such as water and sewer service, essential services such as solid waste disposal, and public safety services such as police and fire and rescue.

This chapter examines the community facilities and services provided in Easton. It offers brief background information on each component of this system and incorporates the input received throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process into a series of goals and objectives.

### BACKGROUND

Easton's public services and utilities are of vital importance to the continued physical, economic, and social improvement of the Town and the surrounding region. Expansion of certain basic economic activities can be more readily accomplished provided that public and private utility and service systems are adequate for the existing and projected population of the Town. A major goal of the Town is to ensure the continued adequate maintenance and expansion of community facilities and public services necessary to guarantee public health, safety and welfare and enhance resident's quality of life. This goal is balanced against the fiscal ability of the Town to provide necessary community facilities and services and its objectives for managing the location and rate of the Town's growth and development. It must also be remembered that because of the Town's dominant function as a regional commercial and employment center, Easton must consider the demands of the surrounding region, as well as the needs for local residents, upon Town facilities and services.

### UTILITIES

Utility service in the Town of Easton is predominantly provided by Easton Utilities, who is responsible for the operation, management and maintenance of the electric, water, sewer, and natural gas (as well as internet and cable television) systems for the Town (and some surrounding areas for some services). In 1923, Easton became the first municipality in the state to own all of its utilities, and this arrangement is still unique today.

The Easton Utilities Commission, a three member board, two of which must be Easton residents with the third only residing in the electric service territory, who are appointed by the mayor with the advice and consent of the Town Council, governs Easton Utilities. A full-time President/CEO has day-to-day responsibilities for executing the policies and regulations as determined by the Commission.

## **ELECTRICITY**

Electricity first came to Easton in 1887 but was not under town jurisdiction until 1915. Electric service is now provided by Easton Utilities to over 11,000 customers in a 54 square mile service territory through onsite generators and through the PJM Interconnection, LLC. Easton residents benefit from this arrangement because Easton Utilities is able to choose the most economical and reliable source of electric power on an hourly basis, either through PJM, through its own generators, or a combination of these sources. Easton's installed electrical generation capacity is 66 megawatts, which is more than adequate to meet the town's current demand.

Until recently, Easton Utilities provided all of Easton with electrical service. However, some recent annexations fall partially within the service areas of other electricity providers. As the Town grows, this will be the case more frequently. The two other providers of electricity in Easton are Choptank Electrical Cooperative and Delmarva Power and Light. Now with multiple service providers, the need for coordination and cooperation among the various electric companies in order to continue to provide Easton with the most optimum service is vital. For example, the various companies can work together to transfer service areas when necessary to avoid situations where single subdivisions or projects would be served by two (or three) different companies. Electric service companies must agree to any service territory boundary changes before they may be made.

## **WATER AND SEWER**

The Easton Utilities Commission also provides water and sewer services for the Town. The Easton Utilities Commission is responsible for the operation,

construction and maintenance of the Town's water and sewer systems. It is anticipated that the Town will remain the sole supplier of water and sewer services in Easton throughout the plan period. The Town's water source currently is derived from wells tapping into deep fresh water aquifers. The Town has supplied water service to its residents since 1914.

The Town of Easton first constructed a sanitary sewage collection system in 1911. Through the subsequent years, as the Town grew so too did the need for additional capacity and treatment. In 1938, a treatment plant was constructed along the banks of the Choptank River. In 1988, construction was completed on an innovative treatment facility. This new facility utilizes an Overland Flow Treatment Process which at the time of construction was the fifth largest such system in the United States. In 2007 a new state-of-the-art enhanced nutrient removal treatment facility was brought online. It has adequate capacity to serve the Town to the year 2051, as given in the Municipal Growth Element.

Extensions of the Town's public water and sewer systems are currently based upon a County-wide Water and Sewer Facilities Plan and "on demand as required" by new development. In accordance with Easton's Water and Wastewater Tariffs, the cost of extending sewer and water to any new development is borne in full by the developer. And, the property to be served must be within the Town corporate limit.

The Town should continue to provide water and sewer delivery services to only those areas within the corporate Town limits. Annexation decisions should carefully consider the costs and benefits of extending services to proposed annexation areas.

The Easton Utilities Commission has established capital and connection fees for water and sewer for all users within the Town, as given in the Water and Wastewater Tariffs. These fees compensate for the Town's expense of connecting service to new development and an equitable proportional share of capital improvements costs for sewer and water systems maintenance and expansion.

More detailed information, particularly with regards to the requirements for water and wastewater service required to satisfy the needs of future growth, are provided in the Municipal Growth and the Water Resources Elements.

### **NATURAL GAS**

Acquired by the Town in 1923, Easton's Gas Department is the only municipal gas utility in the state today. Originally, burning coal at a plant on West Street derived Easton's gas. However, Easton Utilities converted to natural gas in 1966 when it signed an agreement to purchase its gas supply from Eastern Shore Natural Gas Company.

The town's gas supply is now piped in from the Federalsburg, Maryland area, and distributed to over 4,500 customers through 100 miles of steel and plastic mains. The Gas Department distributes an average of 525,000,000 cubic feet of natural gas per year to Easton's residents living in its 8.5 square mile service territory.

### **HOSPITAL FACILITIES**

Hospital Services in the Town of Easton are provided by Shore Health Systems at Memorial Hospital. In the realm of the Comprehensive Plan, this facility has two kinds of impact. The first is the service provided to the community. The second is the impact this facility has on the Town in general and its neighborhood more specifically. In the former area, the impact is unquestionably positive. In the latter though, the results are mixed.

As Memorial Hospital has expanded, the Hospital and surrounding residential areas have encountered increasing conflicts. The Hospital is unable to consolidate all related facilities on a single parcel of land because of a lack of space. As a result the Hospital and its parking facilities have begun to encroach upon the surrounding neighborhood. Neighborhood residents are disturbed by traffic, parking and the intrusion of intensive activities into their residential environment. Activities to reduce conflict between the Hospital and adjoining residential areas include: continued coordination of any remaining Hospital expansion plans with the Town, and improvement of the traffic circulation and parking pattern in the area.

In recent years Shore Health Systems has made a decision to seek a site for a new, state-of-the-art regional medical facility. They studied a site in the Wye Mill's area as well as a new Easton site located between the Talbot Community Center and the current Town boundary adjacent to the airport. Late in 2008, Shore Health Systems announced that they had selected the Easton site. However, for a number of reasons the project was not pursued at that time. It was dormant until the middle of this Plan Update. The project has now received local re-approval of the site plan for the facility and State approval to move forward with the project.

This is terrific news for Easton and its residents. In addition to the medical care that is provided, the Hospital is also a major employer and attracts numerous labs, doctor's offices, physical rehabilitation centers, pharmacies, etc... to Easton. This is both more service for Easton residents, as well as more medically-related jobs.

Remaining to be seen is whether these businesses will move from the Idlewild/Dutchman's Lane area up to the vicinity of the new hospital and what becomes of the current hospital facility. These are issues that will need to be explored in detail as the prospective move comes closer to reality. Also a major unknown at this time is what the impact of the new facility will be on the overall quality of healthcare services for Easton (and Mid-Shore) residents. Many areas of the country are currently suffering from a lack of such services, especially rural areas. The concern becomes all the more acute in Easton and Talbot County where the median age is so high. The issue was clearly on the mind of the public as a number of comments on this topic were made throughout the public input phase of the Plan, despite this not being a common concern in most Comprehensive Plans since there is not, traditionally, a lot the local government can do about the issue.

### **SOLID WASTE FACILITIES**

The citizens of Easton receive collection of their solid waste from the Town. The Town of Easton in turn contracts with Talbot County to dispose of this waste at the Mid-Shore Regional Landfill located on Barkers Landing Road, southeast of town. In 1993, the Town adopted a residential disposal fee to cover the tipping charges associated with solid waste disposal at the landfill.

At the present time the Mid-Shore landfill adequately meets the needs of the citizens of Easton. However, it is scheduled to close on December 31, 2010 and the next Regional Landfill will open the next business day, January 3, 2011 in Caroline County. At that time the Town will need to provide a site or sites for a transfer station(s). The logical location is at the site of the current landfill.

Facilities, in the form of "igloos", for recycling are located at the landfill and at several sites in and around Easton. At present time there is no public curbside recycling service in Easton. A private company (Infinity Recycling) will provide such service for a fee. The County is also exploring options for the reuse of the current landfill site which include a transfer station and recycling center. Curbside recycling is a service that continues to be frequently mentioned whenever we collect public opinion about issues like what service or facility would you like to see expanded or started in Easton. As the Town grows, particularly if it does so in a more dense urban setting, this becomes more feasible. In fact, it is expected that single-stream curbside recycling will begin in Easton in July 2010.

#### **SETTING THE STANDARD WITH PUBLIC BUILDINGS**

A previous Comprehensive Plan Visioning process kicked off with a presentation by Ed McMahon of the Conservation Fund. Mr. McMahon has spoken in Easton on a number of occasions on the general theme of improving the quality of the built environment. One of many excellent points that Mr. McMahon makes concerns the importance of the government setting the standard for a community through its public buildings. The following passage is from Mr. McMahon's book, *Better Models for Development in Virginia*.

***People have long understood that public buildings can help nurture feelings of heritage and community that enrich a nation and its people. Public buildings and spaces create identity and sense of place. They give communities something to remember and admire. The challenge facing public architecture is to provide every generation with structures that***

***link them with their past, fill them with pride, and reinforce their sense of belonging.***

***Public buildings should set the standard in a community. Public buildings with civic stature, quality materials, and prominent settings project a sense of permanence and human scale that expresses the dignity and importance of public institutions.***

***During the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, public buildings [in Virginia] such as city halls, courthouses, post offices, and public schools were always the community's most beautiful and important buildings. In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, public buildings often have been relegated to little more than utilitarian boxes. We sometimes have designed schools and libraries that resemble correctional facilities. We have built fire stations and post offices that look like warehouses, and we have moved many of our public buildings from downtown to new locations on the strip outside of town.***

***People appreciate public buildings that express the dignity, permanence, and importance of civic institutions and which harmonize with their surroundings.***

Easton is blessed with some wonderful public buildings, almost all of which are located, as they should be, downtown. But, it was not without some close calls that this occurred. In the last three decades, Talbot County has advertised for bids to acquire land for new administrative offices and some of the bids were well outside of the downtown area. Somewhat more recently, The Post Office upgraded its existing facility but not before it originally entertained moving out of downtown.

On the positive side of things, the Easton Utilities Commission opened a new Customer Service Center in 2000. This facility is clearly the most significant addition to the Town Center in decades and is a beautiful building that looks as if it

belongs in an historic downtown, which of course, it is. It stands as an example for Town, County and possibly State governments to try to emulate when building new office space in Easton.

One new governmental building that may be necessary in the not-too-distant future is a new Town Office. The current facility at 14 South Harrison Street has proved adequate for many years and is an excellent example of adaptive reuse of a former firehouse and then police station. However it is running short on space to house employees. There may be additional opportunities to add onto the building or it may ultimately prove to be more feasible to build at a new site. If so, the new building should follow the lead of the Easton Utilities Building by (1) being located in downtown and (2) being a building that all of Easton's citizens can be proud of.



*The Easton Utilities Commission's Customer Service Center*

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

**GOAL:**To continue to provide a high-quality of community services and facilities through adequate maintenance of existing systems and the addition of new facilities/services when necessary to guarantee public health, safety and welfare and enhance the quality of life of those who visit, live, or work in Easton.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- ✓ Distribute the cost of community facilities and services equitably between the public, the developer and future users.
- ✓ Require that in conjunction with annexation, developers shall bring any deficient community facilities that serve their project up to Town standards for that facility, on a proportionate basis.
- ✓ Require all community facilities and services users to pay their "fair-share" of capital costs for necessary systems improvements.
- ✓ Ensure that the provision of community facilities and services are coordinated and consistent with the growth and development policies established in this Comprehensive Plan.
- ✓ Ensure that community facilities and services are provided equitably to all Town residents and businesses.
- ✓ Require all development to pay for all road, water, sewer, and other community facilities and services extensions and additions needed as a result of new development utilizing the Town's adopted Impact Fee Ordinance and whatever additional tools may become available.
- ✓ Encourage development to occur in an orderly and logically progressive manner through Town provision or extension of utilities to desirable growth areas with the provision for recapture of the cost thereof from future development.
- ✓ Expand opportunities for Town residents to participate in recycling programs.
- ✓ Encourage the development of a Community Center and/or more recreational/entertainment opportunities for Easton's youth.
- ✓ Encourage regional and innovative approaches to stormwater management.

- ✓ Encourage a college to locate a general purpose or specialized satellite campus in Easton.

GOAL: To coordinate Town community facilities with Plans and services of other agencies.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Encourage Talbot County to amend its Master Water and Sewer Plan to reflect the readiness of projects to proceed within the Easton Growth Area.
- ✓ Avoid having subdivisions served by multiple electric companies by supporting efforts of the Easton Utilities Commission to coordinate service areas with Delmarva Power and/or Choptank Electric in order to create more logical areas of service within the corporate limits of the Town.
- ✓ Continue to utilize a Capital Improvement Program to better coordinate operations and projects between various agencies.

GOAL: To express the dignity and stature of public institutions by constructing great public buildings.

OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Construct public facilities with materials and in a style such that they are generally among the finest buildings in Easton.
- ✓ Build public facilities that are large enough and have ample opportunities for expansion, in order to ensure that they will remain for a very long time.
- ✓ Locate public buildings in, or in close proximity to, the historic Town Center of Easton (one exception may be for smaller "sub-stations" which should be located in outlying neighborhoods, nearer the population they are intended to serve).
- ✓ Encourage Talbot County to locate their public buildings in or near the Town Center as well.
- ✓ Investigate the need for a new Town Office Building or the feasibility of an expansion of the existing building.